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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet includes several program transcripts on educational research from the National Public Radio series, Options in Education. Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education, and Noel Epstein, Education Editor of the Washington Post, discuss "The Quality of Media Reporting on Education" and whether the American public is receiving top quality educational research for its money. "An Outsider's Look at the American Educational Research Assocation" (AERA) is presented by John Merrow. Some Washington, D.C. teachers give their views on whether or not this research ever reaches the classroom. An example of an AERA Convention Workshop is presented. A mini-report is given on the options in formative evaluation findings. Writer Jonathon Kozol discusses the difficulty of getting research funding; while Dr. William Russell, executive officer of the AERA, speaks on "Research and Policitcs." Dr. Hodgkinson and Mr. Epstein engage in further discussion on the "Misuse of Educational Research and Political Bureaucratic Reaction to Educational Research" and "Research in a Pluralistic Society." An educational product salesman offers his pitch. (Author/AV)

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OPTIONS IN EDUCATION

PROGRAM TRANSCRIPTS OF A WEEKLY SERIES BROADCAST BY MEMBER STATIONS OF NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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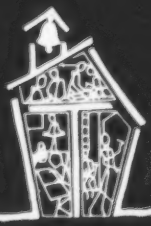

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Program #79

Research & Testing
Part II
May 23, 1977

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RESEARCH & TESTING

PART II

(Sounds of people registering at the American Educational Research Association Convention in New York City)

BLAIR: I'm Wendy Blair.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. And in the background you can hear people registering for a convention.

BLAIR: This week, OPTIONS IN EDUCATION takes a look at an education convention held recently in New York City.

MERROW: Right. It's the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. I was one of a dozen or so reporters among the several thousand educational researchers.

BLAIR: And later in the program you'll meet some of them.

MERROW: And you'll hear about longitudinal data basis, and analysis of covariance.

BLAIR: Education is big business in America. About $130 billion a year. Of that amount, only $500 million, if you stretch it, is spent on educational research. Unfortunately, education research is often misused, ignored or undertaken for dubious reasons.

MERROW: Like that study to determine whether students who drink beer while studying should also drink beer while taking tests. It turns out that they should because it's easier to remember things if you recreate the conditions under which you learned them.

BLAIR: Politics and money play a role in research, too, of course.

MERROW: Yes, Wendy. But none of these topics - money, politics, dubious research - were on the program at the AERA, the researchers' annual meeting.

(More from the AERA Convention)

BLAIR: All of us have private dialects which we speak with only a select group - whether we're computer keypunch operators, doctors or land surveyors. Educators may be no better or no worse, but somehow it seems that they of all professional groups shouldn't be so obscure - because, after all, education is for everyone.

MERROW: A room full of education researchers is a room full of jargon.

RESEARCHER: How they operate together in a performance situation was what I was interested in finding out. Then I came to the, you know, interpretation that testing, you know, whether it's task drive, or test anxiety drive determines the function of the cognitive . . . .

BLAIR: Which means that even if the research is important and useful, we may not understand it.

RESEARCHER: Perhaps high test anxious persons are actually broad categories that . . . .

MERROW: High test anxious people - those are people who are scared of tests?

RESEARCHER: Yeah. Who have a high characteristic reactivity level to - evaluative situations.

MERROW: It's pretty hard to get you folks to speak English.

RESEARCH: Okay. People who get nervous frequently in any kind of evaluative situation - they go to pieces. All right, that's a nigh test anxious person.

MERROW: And there are varieties of research.

BLAIR: Basic research means just that - pure research; analysis of causes and cognitive processes. For example - How do children learn the relationship between the letter "C" and the sound "C?" That's called phoneme analysis, and it may lead to new teaching methods later on after the basic research. The basic researcher tries to isolate a single phenomenon and study it.

MERROW: Applied research is usually directed at a single problem and is done by researchers looking for what works for immediately helpful results. And an applied researcher works in the real world, and tries to relate the theoretical to the real.

BLAIR: Program evaluation is usually lumped with education research and it comes in two forms -- Formative (that's evaluation during a program so the results can have an impact on next week's or next year's work) -- and, then, there's summative evaluation which is done after a program is completed to assess the results, what went wrong, and what could make it better or more effective next time.

MERROW: Let's not forget synthesis - the process of gathering up all the research, comparing it, examining it, and making it all into a coherent whole. Understanding the special language, the jargon, is difficult for lay consumers of education research. The media's job is often to translate the esoteric into plain, simple English, but reporting about education and education research apparently is part of the problem. According to Dr. Harold Hodgkinson and Noel Epstein. Bud Hodgkinson is the former Director of the National Institute of Education, the Federal education research agency. Noel Epstein is Education Editor of The Washington Post. I asked them about the quality of reporting about education.

DR. HAROLD HODGKINSON & NOEL EPSTEIN

HODGKINSON: It's really not terribly good. Part of the difficulty is that any study that produces a negative finding almost always gets front-page, and any study that produces some relatively positive findings tends to get buried up with the Sports Section or the want-ads. One good example of this is that in the early years of the reporting on Follow Through and Headstart produced negative responses - especially the Westinghouse evaluation. Those all went on the first page. This last six months we've been getting steadily better results on the third and fourth year of those kids' progress in Follow Through and Headstart, and I have yet to see it on a front page of any newspaper in the country.

MERROW: Noel, why doesn't The Washington Post put the good news on the front-page of The Washington Post?

EPSTEIN: Essentially because nobody has told the papers what's been happening with Follow Through and Headstart. The researchers have not released their reports and put press releases on them, and sent them around to the press.

MERROW: Wait a minute. I hear you saying that what the public reads is inaccurate, things are out of whack. And I hear Bud Hodgkinson saying that the problem is that newspapers only report bad news. They bury the good news. I hear Noel Epstein of The Washington Post saying, "That's not the problem. The problem is that you people in research don't know how to get the word out." Solve it. Noel?

EPSTEIN: Well, there are several issues here. I think that the public is frequently getting misleading perceptions about education from research. One problem is that I believe the researchers are frequently asking the wrong questions and that is a problem that usually stems from political considerations rather than the researchers' considerations. Researchers would prefer to ask other questions frequently than the ones they're asking. The second problem is that I think there's a problem with the nature of the media. I don't think frequently they can cope with the ambiguity that comes out of research.

MERROW: That's a good point.

EPSTEIN: There's a need for a headline, for a lead, first paragraph, and it's very difficult to get anything into the paper that says, "Maybe this - maybe that!" But, frequently, the research shows, "Maybe this - maybe that."

HODGKINSON: The reportorial community would like educational research to simplify, and researchers would like it to complexify - because, basically, they want to take a phenomenon and make it as various as it is necessary in order to explain the variety of human activity they see in front of them. Reporters tend to want to pull it in toward a single theory, a single explanation, and that's perfectly understandable.

MERROW: But why is it that education research always is so ambiguous? Why is it that you're always saying, "Well, we seem to have found this, but this might mean only this for the third-graders in the eastern section of the city."

HODGKINSON: Everybody's dissertation - and the dissertation is the training mode whereby researchers become researchers - is designed to take a single phenomenon and divide it up into eight parts. That's what almost all dissertations are all about. And people who go into research are people who tend to love that sort of thing. So, you do have a built-in tendency to complexify.

EPSTEIN: Researchers frequently - and because of political decisions - ask a question, "Does something work or not work?" And the way they look at that question is, frequently, by looking on the average does it work or not work. I think it's reasonable to say that almost any educational approach, "on the average" may not help all students or most students, and, yet, still help millions of students. And, so, what we get is frequently a report as with the American Institutes for Research study on innovative programs which concluded that on the average the programs seemed to make little difference,

but within that average it made a dramatic difference to millions of children.

MERROW: Well, now, that sounds like to me that that's the reporter's fault. Why can't you just report that? Can't you say that 32% of the innovative programs work? Or 80% work for some kids?

EPSTEIN: Well, the problem in this one case was that the summary of the research drew the conclusion that it didn't make any difference. They emphasized this overwhelmingly. And in the back of the summary, which was 30-40 pages later, it kind of had a shrug and said, "So, what's new? Some things are going to work for some kids and some things aren't going to work for other kids."

MERROW: Well, now that seems, again . . it sounds to me as if the problem is in the press in not being able to understand that.

HODGKINSON: There's another important thing about this particular area, and that is that researchers always try to write "executive summaries" for reporters and other busy people in which you take a 400-page report and boil it down to two pages. And some of the pressure that gets on researchers towards saying, "Well, what's the mean figure?" -- which means that you add up all your results, and divide by the number of kids, which gives you a terribly erroneous executive summary. And if you look in the back, you'll find, as Noel has suggested, that millions of kids are benefiting spectacularly, and other millions are not, and if you add all that up and divide by the number of kids, you get no change.

MERROW: There may be another factor. The extent to which researchers, an individual researcher, is out to make his own reputation, is out to achieve a "name" as the person who has done such-and-such a study, and, therefore, disregards all the other studies and just concentrates as much attention on his or her own thing.

HODGKINSON: I don't think that it's necessary to disregard all the other studies. It helps. (Laughter) But it is necessary. Indeed, in the physical sciences, you find an awful lot of people who are just, obviously, bent on discovering the double helix or whatever. So, high motivation for achievement, as an individual researcher, I don't think is a problem at all. The problem is ignoring the rest of the data. And we have very few people who like to synthesize data and put stuff together. It's much more fun to get your own.

MERROW: Noel?

EPSTEIN: It's very difficult under an hour-and-a-half deadline pressure, or something of that sort to look through the executive summary, which frequently runs, oh, anywhere from 5-15 pages or maybe 20 pages, and then look through two volumes of 200-pages of research, and write a story to fit into 15 inches of newsprint.

MERROW: Now, let me argue with you? You said an hour-and-a-half deadline. It doesn't happen that way. The report comes out, and there's a hold on it. It says . . you get it on May 1st, and it will say, "Not for release until 5:00 PM, May 25th."

EPSTEIN: Oh, that's not frequently the case I've found. You get it just before it's available, and you've got six other things to do, and you've got

editors talking to you about other stories, and you're trying to write, and they tell you you have 15 inches in the newspaper to do it. And, then, you have to write some kind of conclusion overall about what this research showed.

MERROW: And do you write your own headline?

EPSTEIN: Absolutely not!

HODGKINSON: I have a bone to pick on that score. I've seen so many beautiful articles that really tried to get into an issue carefully, and then you see a dumb headline that was written by somebody who didn't understand the problem. One such came out of Iowa. It was a good discussion of testing, and the headline was, "Half the Students In Iowa Are Reading Below Average."

MERROW: Now, what's wrong with that?

HODGKINSON: Well, of course, they're reading below average. That's exactly what you would expect. You can't have everybody reading above average. And the headline writer simply hadn't read the story.

BLAIR: Dr. Harold Hodgkinson and Noel Epstein. We'll hear from them again later in this program, but let's go back to the AERA, the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

MERROW: Right now, it's between sessions. Sessions generally last, oh, an hour, an hour-and-a-half, at conventions like this. And right now, on the second floor of the Hilton Hotel anyway there are hundreds of people kind of milling around, moving from one session to the next. A lot of people are undecided. One of the common sights at a convention like this is people walking and thumbing through the directory as they walk. The directory, in fact, is 301 pages, to be exact. So, people are standing around, thumbing through and trying to figure out what they want to go to. For example, at this moment - I have a directory in front of me right now - and I have to make some choices as do all the other people. I could, for example, go listen to a paper on "The Effect of Organization Development Training on Goal Agreement Among School Faculty Members." If that doesn't interest me, I could go listen to a paper entitled, "What Type of College Do Career Salient Women Choose? Co-Educational or Women's?" If I decide to skip that one, I could go hear an analysis of "Longitudinal Data From Compensatory Education Programs" or "The Analysis of the Candidate's Success or Failure in a New York City Community School Board Election Using the Tri-System Model." As I say, it's a smorgasbord of strange, and perhaps indigestible food, but it's a smorgasbord nonetheless. "Identifying Individual Learning Styles: The First Step to Diagnostic & Prescriptive Education" - "Measurement Error in the Johnson-Nieman Technique" - "Conducting Linear Aggression Analysis When Observations Have Varying Standards of Measurement" - "Adherence Counseling in a Clinical Trial" - "Drug Withdrawal & Self-Management Training for Drug Dependent Insomniacs" - "Developmental Theory Implications of Imagery Research" - "Employment After Graduation: What Happens to the Graduates with a Non-Traditional Degree Program?" - "The Identification of Teacher Process Variables Affecting Student Outcomes in Two Alternative Science Curriculum Treatment Settings." I have to say that I get the sneaky suspicion that there's an award given to the paper with the longest title, and I think this might be the winner -- "Increased Instructional Effectiveness As A Function of Training Teachers in a Problem-Solving Approach in the Design of Effective Instructional Systems For Group Discussion." I think that's the one I'll go to.

BLAIR: It's a smorgasbord all right, and we do have an award for the longest title. We'll tell you the winner later on, and we'll wander around the convention with John in a few minutes. But let's rejoin that conversation with Harold Hodgkinson and Noel Epstein. Not all research studies are like the titles John was reading. There is a lot of good research - at least according to Hodgkinson and Epstein. And research conditions have changed.

MORE WITH HODGKINSON & EPSTEIN

HODGKINSON: There's a general principle that I think is important to realize. The schools in the past have fundamentally tried to pick winners, and they've tried to reject others. Today, there's a new tendency to try to find more winners, and to get more "track" conditions, if you will, where more runners can finish strong. We want more people to win. That puts a whole new burden on research that's not been there before. The standardized test is easy. If you make it, you're in. If you don't make it, you're out. But these new conditions require a lot of research oriented techniques that I think are going to be quite interesting.

MERROW: $130 billion a year in education. $500 million in research. That seems to me to be a paltry, insignificant sum, and I'm not trying to give you a good lead there, but it does seem . . .

HODGKINSON: You couldn't ask for better. That's the best line I've had in two years. It is paltry. In agriculture, it runs between 4-6% of the national investment, and in medicine, it's 8%, and most industries put in at least 10% into R&D, and in education it's less than 1/2 of 1%. And I think education is a more complex thing to study even than agriculture right now. So, people are asking a lot of educational research when it's still a relative infant compared to other fields.

MERROW: Then, the next question is - Do we get anything for that little bit of money? Do we get our money's worth?

HODGKINSON: Yeah. We have just abundant evidence that we've learned a lot in the early grades about how to teach kids to read phonetically, and the test scores have gone up consistently over the last decade in the first three years of school. This is the reason why I think Noel wanted to get into this issue here. The notion that research cannot show demonstrable gains in student learning is just not true. And we can find programs - Headstart and a lot of other examples - where either individualized instruction or some other program will consistently produce better gains on tests. The problem is that the tests those students show gains on are themselves being questioned today, and that's where the issue gets a little more complicated.

MERROW: But you're saying that we are getting something for our money? Not long ago, I was at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, and I must have run into 50 people, if I ran into one, who was getting ready to read a paper on "The Influence of the Decibel Level of the Teacher's Voice As Directed to the Right Hand Side of the Classroom in Eastern St. Louis." And there's somebody earning his stripes there. What's going on?

HODGKINSON: Sounds great.

EPSTEIN: Put that into a headline! (Laughter)

MERROW: But what's the value of that stuff?

HODGKINSON: Most of those studies are simply things that people are doing because they are academics in a college or university setting, and they have to do some research in order to get tenure, to be very frank. Most of those studies will never see the light of day, and probably shouldn't. But most of those studies don't have a heavy Federal obligation of support. That's something that the person does on their own time, or they get up a very small amount of local money. There's an awful lot of irrelevant research that's going on - primarily because very few researchers have actually taught or been administrators. One of my personal vendettas is to get more research people who've had a background in teaching or in administration.

BLAIR: Dr. Harold Hodgkinson and Noel Epstein. Later in the program we'll hear their views on the misuse of educational research.

MERROW: Hodgkinson said that a lot of those irrelevant studies will never see the light of day, but it may be that even the unquestionably worthwhile research never has an impact on teachers or students - that is, it never affects the business of the classroom.

BLAIR: We sent Reporter David Selvin to a local school to talk to a few teachers about research. He told them about "KPU's" - which seems to be some Federal bureaucrat's new term for educational research. KPU stands for "Knowledge, Production & Utilization." And, apparently, we spend $500 million a year on KPU.

MERROW: Reporter David Selvin asked the teachers if the results of research, I mean KPU, ever reached the classroom.

TEACHER: Unless it is something that's extraordinarily new and different. We never feel or see the effects. I'm tired of so much money being spent on studying this and studying that, and study, study, study . . when the money could be put to such better use. It always amazes me how research people can get money for whatever they want. I mean, if you come up with a good idea, a good premise, and say, "I want to research this." Somehow or another, there's always money available for that. But if you say, "We need books, paper, equipment." Somehow, there's never any money, never any money! It just never ceases to amaze me. You know, like in a food class, in order to have the supplies to work with I have to use my own money to purchase the food, and we can only spend like a certain amount. Well, it's from my budget, really. And I have to wait until I can get that money back before I go on and spend some more, if I want to spend my whole check. And sometimes it takes a month and a half. So, you can see where the problem is. We just don't have the supplies and the equipment to even work with.

TEACHER: I think there's also another place where more money should be spent, and that is in teacher training or re-training because certainly we are the ones who directly affect many, many children. But when results of studies . . . well, as she said, they're put in a corner, and we really are never given any instruction in how to put the results into effect in our classrooms. So, it doesn't do anyone any good I don't feel - except the people who get the money for the research.

TEACHER: Well, I'm for the research if we can get some end results out of it. Okay. Some of that money is going to come directly to the teachers, like she's already mentioned, and I'm for it.

BLAIR: Teachers in Washington, D. C. talking with Reporter David Selvin. Incidentally, there are close to 50 million students in elementary and secondary schools now, and so $500 million works out to about $10 per child. I think if those teachers want more equipment and more supplies for their classroom, they'd be better off pushing for more money locally.

MERROW: I'm going to sound like a cynic, Wendy, but I have to disagree with that teacher who said that all a researcher had to do was come up with a good idea and he or she could get money. It doesn't work that way as far as I can tell. There are fashions in education research just as there are in clothes. And this year's hot idea will get the research money. A few years ago, it was the open classroom. Desegregation was a burning research topic for years. And one year it was decentralization and community control.

BLAIR: What is it this year, John? Do you know?

MERROW: Well, consumer education is in favor, and so is career education. But I think there's a law, Sullivan's Law, which states that researchers follow money.

BLAIR: Sounds like human nature to me. Anyway, let's go back to New York and the AERA meeting.

MERROW: I didn't make it to that paper I'd hoped to go to. I got waylaid there; went in and listened to some talk about evaluations of compensatory education, and then moved on to a discussion of the effect of malnutrition and now I'm back in one of the rooms where there are roundtable discussions. In this room, it looks as if there are 14 tables, and it's interesting to see how some discussions are popular and others are not. Over on my right, about 40 people are listening to a woman describe learning styles, and methods of diagnosing learning styles. Down at Table #9, the man with the paper is sitting there all by himself. His paper had to do with teacher elections, and now he's getting up. I guess he's maybe a little embarrassed, but, anyway, nobody has chosen to come sit and listen to his paper. Most of the other tables have about ten people around them I'd say - although Table #4 has absolutely nobody. Now, the man from Table #9 has come to join the group of 40 or so. In other words, he's picking the most popular place, and going to find out what's going on there. I think I'll wander around and pick a table and see what I can learn.

RESEARCHER: Now, I'd like to introduce Dr. Kenneth Dunn, who, as Gary told you, is Superintendent of Schools. He's going to test you and show you at least one segment of your learning style so that you can see the tremendous implications for the classroom.

DUNN: 1970's Farr and Domino. And we refer to them in the research - have shown that students can tell you what their learning style is, in a general way; that they'll score higher if you'll teach them in their own learning style, and if you test them in their own learning style. So, with all of that research available in learning, we really ought to find out how they learn best, and then prescribe according to that. All right. Now, we didn't realize that we were going to have quite so many people. So, if some of you up here - I'd like you to work on these together. This will actually test you, right here and now, on your time line. All right? When you work best. So, I will pass these out. Answer them viscerally. As soon as you read the questions, simply respond "true" or "false." You

see, there are a series of questions. "I hate to get up in the morning. I hate to go to sleep at night. I could sleep all morning. I feel sleepy after lunch." . . . and so on.

MERROW: I think the test is just about over. Most people seem to have finished, and now are looking up.

DUNN: Everybody about ready? I'm going to help you to score this now. One of the things you can do - whether it's industry classroom or school - is you can literally plot the time style of each student. Do we have someone here who starts out with a "10:00 in the morning?" Okay. Ten in the early morning. What do you score in the late morning?

MAN: Six.

DUNN: Six. All right. Afternoon?

MAN: Three.

DUNN: Three. Night?

MAN: Zero.

DUNN: Zero. Okay. What is your first name, sir?

TOM: Tom.

DUNN: Tom. Well, Tom has what we call "the principal syndrome." Are you a principal, sir?

TOM: Yes. I am.

DUNN: Well, did it again! We've never met before. Right? Okay. He was not planted in the audience. Although it sounds like that. I don't know what it is. Whether the job attracts people who have this, or the job drives them to it. We suspect you are stuck with your learning style, that it's biological. We read some things on biorhythms and the cycles, but even if the biorhythm people are correct on 33-day cycles of depression or whatever, we think the daily pattern overrides most of the time, and you are what you are, in all of these 18 elements. At least we haven't found any differences. We're trying some longitudinal studies to see whether or not learning style changes, which could be quite interesting. So far we haven't found it to change.

MERROW: The Dunns conclude from their study that we all have learning styles, and that schools ought to be scheduled to fit with learning styles So, kids might go to school in the morning. Some might go to school in the afternoon - just as "flex time" is taking hold in factories and other work situations around the country - they say the same thing should happen in schools since we all have learning styles that can be measured.

BLAIR: Well, I know that my learning style depends on a lot of things - including whether I had enough sleep last night.

MERROW: Well, even if it's true about kids and their different learning styles, I doubt if anyone will seriously consider rescheduling the hours of the local elementary school - keeping it open, say, from 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM.

BLAIR: In other words, how practical was that research?

MERROW: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION has just completed some research, and we'd like to share some of the results. Many of you - over 6,000, in fact - were asked to fill out a questionnaire about yourselves, your listening habits, and your use of our transcripts. Over 1,500 of you did.

BLAIR: Here are a few facts about who our listeners are.

MERROW: 64% of you have a total family income of less than $20,000, but 79% of you have a college degree, and 34% have done graduate work.

BLAIR: That leads easily to the next fact which may be easy to guess. A lot of you work in education. 57%, in fact.

MERROW: One-third of the 1,500 responding are actually teachers, and the median age is 35.

BLAIR: Our research would be classified as "formative evaluation" - that is, we were looking for information to help us improve the program and increase the use of transcripts. We didn't begin with a random sample of the general population, and then ask if they listened to OPTIONS IN EDUCATION We began with listeners who'd written to us.

MERROW: We didn't have a control group either. One reason research is expensive is that to test the effectiveness of, for example, a new reading program, you need one group that will be taught with the new program, and another group - as much like the first group as possible (age, race, family background and so forth). This second group won't be taught in the new way. And, then, you pre-test both groups to find out how well they read before the experiment begins. Then, you teach them reading, but using the new way with only one group, and the old way with another group. And then after you've finished the teaching experiment, you give both groups what's called a "post-test" to find out if there's any difference in what they'd learned.

BLAIR: We haven't yet mentioned production functions and stable production functions which may be the Achilles Hell of research. Researchers assume stable learning rates for all kids, just as a factory can be assumed to have a stable rate for turning out automobile fenders or cans of soup day after day, month after month. But that doesn't really work with education. People aren't machines. Anyone with kids knows that their own children learn at wildly different rates. What they ate for breakfast, the time of day and even the season can affect how they learn. And, yet, research often doesn't recognize that.

MERROW: There's always been and probably always will be controversy over the methods and techniques used in any kind of research. But there's another problem that bothers many people -- Who gets the money for what kind of research? Jonathon Kozol, the writer and education critic, talked to Reporter Eric Baum about the difficulties he's had getting research money.

JONATHON KOZOL

KOZOL: The universities are always willing to put out money and to back projects which will research the feasibility of certain things - feasibility projects are always very popular - and they'll spend ten times as much money

researching the feasibility of something as they will in doing the thing, the feasibility of which becomes lower and lower - the more and more money they're wasting on questioning that feasibility. So, to give you a simple example -- In Boston, at a time when we were trying to find out how we could get money from this little charity in Boston called "The Committee for the Permanent Charities." We went in there and the most money they could conceivably cough up for us - after long, long beggary - was $10,000. And it's one of the biggest local foundations in Boston. About a year later, I got a call from someone at a place called "The Joint Center for Urban Studies" of Harvard and M.I.T., and she asked me if she could talk with me on the phone, or come interview me on the free schools, and I said, "Well, what do you want to interview me about?" And she said, "I'm interested in the troubles you're having raising money. We assume that you're not having much success." And I said, "That's a good assumption." And then she said, "Well, we were wondering if we could find out how you feel about . . . what your response is -- how you feel about not getting support from these major corporations." This junk that comes out of T-groups and sensitivity sessions, you know. They're not interested in how we could get the money, but were interested in how we feel. And I said, "Well, I can save you a lot of time right now. I'll just tell you that we feel very bad. And, besides, you'd be wasting subway fare to come over here to find that out." And she said, "No, no. You don't understand. We have to interview you and a lot of parents and get their intimate reactions to things."

BAUM: She was being funded by somebody?

KOZOL: I said to her, "Where are you getting your money? Do you mind me asking you?" And she said, "Yes. As a matter of fact, we just got $40,000 from the Committee for the Permanent Charities." I blew my top! I said to her, "In other words, they gave you $40,000 to do this project to find out why they only gave us $10,000, and how we feel about it?" And she said, "Yeah. Well, that's not a very nice way of saying it." And I said, "Well, it may not be a very nice way to say it, but it's the truth, isn't it?" And she said, "Well, yes. I rather guess it is." I said, "Look, I have a perfect solution. I'll get a lot of parents together," and I knew the parents I had in mind - that they'd play ball" - and I said, "We'll talk to you. We'll give you all the facts. We'll tell you how we feel, oh boy . . will we tell you how we feel? And we'll tell you exactly how much money we've asked for, and how many times we've been refused, and we'll tell you, also, how we feel about you, what you're doing, and the price will be $1,000 an hour, and we won't do it for less than ten hours." And her answer? I'm sure you can expect was this. She said, "Well, we really couldn't do that because then it wouldn't constitute pure research."

BLAIR: School critic Jonathon Kozol talking with Reporter Eric Baum of member station KHKE-KUNI in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

(A researcher gives an example of "research jargon.")

BLAIR: I don't think I get any of that, John.

MERROW: Well, there were four or five people at that table nodding their heads in agreement. So, I guess they understood. I've studied that stuff, and I was completely confused.

BLAIR: Education researchers are often faulted for talking only to themselves, and for not being aware of the world and its politics. William Russell is the Executive Officer of the AERA, and he agrees that AERA members aren't politically sophisticated, by and large. John talked with Russell at the convention.

WILLIAM RUSSELL

MERROW: Maybe I've been in Washington too long, but I have the sense that many of your members really don't have much sophistication regarding politics, and let me cite an anecdote. At a session this morning, there were five speakers. The first four gave their presentations. The last was to be a man from Capitol Hill, who's on one of the congressional committees on education. The Moderator said at the end of the four speakers, to introduce the man from Capitol Hill, "Now, we've finished with the substantive presentations. Now, let's hear from someone from Congress."

RUSSELL: That does not surprise me at all. Many of our members are not very sophisticated in what does happen in Washington, and, of course, its implications. However, I do firmly believe there is a minority - but a significant minority - that is very well sophisticated in the ways of Washington and its importance, and they can be effective.

MERROW: Let me ask you to role-play for a second? Imagine you're up on Capitol Hill testifying before the Congress, and the Congressman says to you, "Mr. Russell, what are the three most important achievements of educational research?"

RUSSELL: That is a question that has, in fact, been asked to AERA as well as to The National Institute of Education. I would probably give sort of a general statement. "We do not have the moon shot in education. Progress is made in incremental, steadily incremental, stages where we think improvements are made in education. I think we could look to things like individualized instruction. I think we could look at things on measurement, in the measurement area, where we have a better technology now to measure students' progress or lack of progress or diagnostic capabilities that will assist the teachers in knowing where additional attention must be paid, and what kinds of instruction is most effective for children in given circumstances. The attempt to come up with the one thing that will revolutionize education is not very likely. But if we can have a better knowledge space of what works under what conditions, and the conditions are very broad - in terms of knowing something about the student population and their characteristics as well as something about the schools and the teachers and the administrators, and the school boards and the entire community, to get a better match between what's available in products -- products being curriculum materials, procedures, how to organize the school district, operations -- I think we will and have made progress in improving education for children in this country."

MERROW: When you say that to the Congress, does the Congress accuse you of not being specific?

RUSSELL: Yeah. They look at it differently. They want factual data. "Can you indicate . . . how do you explain the decline in test scores?" And there are some indications along those lines. "How do you explain the lack of confidence that the public, in general, has about education?" But I think you have to point out that it's a relatively unique experimont we're

conducting in this country to try and education all children to their maximum capabilities and you pay a price for that kind of effort. I hope that the price is not to stifle and not to allow our most talented children to progress and make any contributions, but the contributions of this country are, I think, very tangible proof that the educational system must have worked. The people in Congress, by some criteria, obviously, are very successful people. They've all come through an educational program - whether it's public or private.

MERROW: That sounds to me like it might be a good way to appeal to the Congress. William Russell, Executive Officer of the American Educational Research Association.

Now, I'm in the West Ballroom in another session of the AERA, and this, in a way, is a kind of . . . this is a typical session, I guess, at least from the ones I've attended so far. The West Ballroom must seat 1,000 people. And there are perhaps 75 people here. Most are sitting near the door. So, what happens is . . and it's kind of funny . . . just take my word for it . . . people get up and leave after about five minutes, the people around the door. They sit down for a few minutes and get up and leave. There's a hard core of 50 or 60 who are sitting in, and up at the podium, which is a long, long way away -- it seems like it's about a football field away, probably about that distance -- there are seven people, each of whom is going to present a short version of a paper. Ten or fifteen of the people in this room are looking at their programs, figuring out what they're going to do next, or trying to figure out what they're hearing. So, that the real action at the American Educational Research Association meeting must be somewhere else. It's not here in the West Ballroom!

BLAIR: The real action, as he put it, is probably as much social and personal as a sort of invisible college of researchers, and the AERA meeting once a year is its only real chance to meet. Maybe giving a paper is just an excuse to get to the meeting, to renew old friendships, make new ones, and to talk to people who speak the same language.

MERROW: I think you're right, Wendy. It's a kind of cross-fertilization process. So, the researchers in Iowa, Oregon and Massachusetts can share notes without having to wade through their own long, jargony articles in education journals.

BLAIR: Then, there's another side - the political side of research, and the possible misues of research studies. Dr. Harold Hodgkinson is former Director of The National Institute of Education, and Noel Epstein is Education Editor of The Washington Post.

MERROW: I asked them whether politicians and bureaucrats simply ignore research findings that don't agree with what they want to believe.

DR. HAROLD HODGKINSON & NOEL EPSTEIN

HODGKINSON: Let me give you a classic example because it happened to me in congressional testimony about four months ago. One of the things we support is a satellite program to reach people who can't be reached by other educational means. We have four evaluations of the satellite program. Two of them have a final, concluding section which says, "Satellite programs are not an efficient way of delivering educational services unless the following

conditions are met," and the conditions are then listed. In the Hearings, the statement was read, "Satellites are not an efficient way of delivering educational services." Period! So, it's as simple as that in some cases, and I'm sure it gets more complex. That's a sort of semantic way to do it. I'm sure there are other ways of handling the issue of distortion equally effectively.

MERROW: But you're using just one example. Is it a widespread phenomenon that people ignore the research that doesn't agree with what they believe?

HODGKINSON: Sure. I think in a way it's very much like this psychiatrist in a law court. The defense has theirs, and the other side has theirs. It's very difficult to say that there is an unequivocal social science in which you can only have one sociologist who would report for the defense, and nobody would come up for the prosecution. You can always find somebody on the other side.

MERROW: Noel?

EPSTEIN: I would say that research is heavily influenced by political decisions and political needs. And, again, it comes down to many times how you ask the question. What is your question? On innovative programs, on testing, the so-called "test score decline" that everybody's concerned about, on Title I, Students for the Disadvantaged, how do you ask the question? What is it you're out to find? That, frequently, is politically motivated.

MERROW: Well, I have one example from my own background. When I was in graduate school, I was part of a group that did a study of evaluation in one part of the Office of Education. And we sort of got excited and got carried away, and we discovered that there were a lot of evaluations, but none of them were used. The people had already made up their minds. They were making decisions on the basis of what they called "the light in the kids' eyes." Or, "the seat of the pants," you know. Some kind of phrase! So, we did this study which, essentially, said, "There were a lot of these interesting evaluations, but nobody paid any attention to them." And, then, the people in the Office of Education, who had commissioned the study, refused to accept the study because it didn't agree with what they wanted to hear, I guess! We got into all kinds of trouble.

HODGKINSON: Exhibit A.

EPSTEIN: Well, I have examples, as you know, on bilingual education, and other things. There's been misuse of research on the one hand, and there's been what you're talking about - a tendency to ignore research that does show value on the other hand because of . . . .

MERROW: Well, if that's the case - if research is so widely, politically distorted - what's the value of educational research? How about a one-minute defense?

HODGKINSON: Well, first of all, there is some research that is going to be so massive, and so powerful, that I think it will be very difficult to distort politically. The Title I study that's coming out of NIE right now, I think, will be very, very difficult to distort. There's always interpretations, but I think the broader the data base the less likely that's going to be.

MERROW: The question of the political biases of research. You know, we always talk about . . . we'd like to raise this notion that research is somehow objective, but I think we all know, and I suspect that people out there listening know, that there are researchers who have biases, and if you're interested in a study that's going to stress the beneficial effects in the community of desegregation, there are a certain stable of researchers you'd probably choose from among. And if you want studies that are going to show you how desegregation is ripping the community apart or ruining the schools, there is another bunch of researchers you'd likely turn to. Bud?

HODGKINSON: Yeah. This is a problem for funding agencies, too, because I think you're quite right. If you give a grant to a certain individual who's dyspeptic about the world, you know very well that it's unlikely that that person's going to come out saying, "This is the greatest thing ever. Kids are getting better. A thousand flowers are blooming!" So, there is a tendency even on the part of funding agencies that support the research in the first place to know something about a person's previous track record, and, therefore, you can make some bet on how the data's going to come out. All up and down the line I don't think there is an objective or value-free spot. Reporters have their biases. Researchers have theirs. Teachers have theirs. Judges have theirs. There is no way you can get away from that. The techniques, I think, are now becoming more objective in that you can replicate a lot of educational research and get the same answers. But the values that cause you to use those techniques in certain areas and not on others -- that's where you get the subjectivity.

BLAIR: Dr. Harold Hodgkinson and Noel Epstein. We'll hear from them again later. But, meanwhile, back in New York . . . .

MERROW: A big part of any convention - the exhibits. And the American Educational Research Association meeting is really no different except in this case most of the exhibits are publishers with books. Usually, educational conventions have all sorts of gimmickry, all kinds of new teaching machines, and shiny new machines, parallel bars and gymnasium toys and all kinds of things - but this is mostly books. People wander around looking at the different books, and you often can pick up a free bag to carry your other free things in, or you can sign up and have some stuff mailed to you. Some of the booths are more active than others. Some places people are just sitting and waiting for customers, but others actually have people giving demonstrations.

A HUCKSTER GIVES HIS PITCH: "THE SPELLBINDER"

HUCKSTER: How many pounds on the right side? You said nine.

Eleven, now. Did you want nine? What I'm able to do is put the nine in, and you're right. All right, but you see - instead of the teacher saying "right" or "wrong," "Spellbinder" sets up the environment for the student to be able to go ahead and do their own. What's the next one?

WOMAN: How many pounds on the right side of the scale? God, what is this? Eleven.

HUCKSTER: Now, I don't have to say "right" or "wrong" anymore, do I? I've got more important things, as a teacher, to do than to give out papers,

correct them, and I'm sure all these people here at this meeting know the validity of getting your work sheets back 24 hours later . . . so, "Spellbinder" gives you immediate reinforcement, incremental rewards, host of problems. You can even make your own cards.

WOMAN: You can get . . . really get frustrated with it.

MERROW: Are you sold on this teaching device?

WOMAN: No. If I was in fourth grade, I'd be really frustrated if I couldn't get the right answer. And you've got no one to tell you if you're right or wrong. You see, you've got the machine telling you you're wrong, but you don't have the machine telling you what your next step is.

HUCKSTER: Oh, you don't. Well, that's very interesting. In other words, if the child does something wrong, you want the teacher immediately . . . .

WOMAN: You see, the child could get frustrated, you know, by keeping on trying, and no one saying, "Okay" - or no one saying, "Good." Or, "You're on the right track." Because that's encouragement. You need encouragement. You see, either you're right or you're wrong. You don't have any encouragement.

HUCKSTER: Beautiful! Thirty children in a classroom. Have you been teaching yet? No.

WOMAN: Well, no.

HUCKSTER: Right? You haven't been teaching. So, you have thirty children. That's the problem we're concerned with. There are thirty children in a classroom. How nice it would be one-on-one, and, you know, school budgets don't allow it. Let me give you an example of teaching right for the moment. Forget the arithmetic. I'm going to take you to a whole new environment. Sign language, for the moment. Here's a butterfly.

MERROW: Now you're teaching sign language.

HUCKSTER: Correct. I'm just taking - instead of going to traditional lithography, I'm trying to create a new . . . I'm teaching. Nobody can replace the teacher. And all 'Spellbinder" does is set up a mode so that somebody can go ahead - the students or anything else - and test their hypotheses.

MERROW: Now, when you put the hand sign for "butterfly" in that little machine, if it's a correct answer it lights up.

HUCKSTER: You know, the beautiful thing about it is that you made this card, too. We have blank cards where you make your own. So, here's a ship. I'm going to do this one right for you. You see the ship? You see the stack and the ship going, okay? I'm going to do these three for you right for the moment.

WOMAN: So, all your machines are not a replacement for you. They're just like a helper.

HUCKSTER: Right, that's correct! Teacher's aide we call it. There's a bull or a cow. You notice that right away. Here's the sun. Starts in the

east and comes down in the west. These are sign languages. I'm teaching it to you. You hear the way I'm really giving it to you fast. Here's bread. You're slicing bread. That's a symbolism for bread. And here's a tree. All right?

WOMAN: Is this sign language for the deaf?

HUCKSTER: That's correct. This is sign language for the deaf. Notice what I'm going to do now. What's what? A butterfly? Ship? Cow? I've taught you now, haven't I? I've taught you six symbols.

WOMAN: I might forget it soon.

HUCKSTER: Watch what happens with the "Spellbinder." I'm not going to tell you "right" or "wrong" anymore, Eileen. You don't want that. You don't want somebody to tell you you're right or wrong.

MERROW: Now you have to do it.

HUCKSTER: I've got more important things to do than to say you're right or wrong.

MERROW: You've got all six right. Congratulations!

WOMAN: Well, thank you.

HUCKSTER: See the environment now. Isn't that a good feeling? Do you need teacher to say, "Wonderful." She gets tired of that.

MERROW: Roy Nelson who's selling his teaching machine called "Spellbinder." That's the hard sell here at the convention. At a lot of places, the people are just sitting, hoping somebody will stop by.

BLAIR: Several times during this examination of educational research, we've heard from Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education, and Noel Epstein, Education Editor of The Washington Post. Let's, again, rejoin their conversation with John.

MORE WITH DR. HAROLD HODGKINSON & NOEL EPSTEIN

MERROW: I wonder if I can try to get some sort of summary statement from both of you. You know, we have this confusion of educational research. We have reporting that simplifies enterprises inherently complex - a question of how children and adults learn. We have researchers whose mind-set is toward ambiguity, who have what they call "a high tolerance for ambiguity." We have reporters who don't. We have editors . . . (Laughter) . . . with even less. And, then, finally, you have an educational enterprise which spends $130 billion a year, and we are only willing to spend $500 million, less than 1/2 of 1% on studying research. What's the future? Is it more of this muddle and jumble? Bud Hodgkinson.

HODGKINSON: Well, the "muddle and jumble" you talk about is an inevitable consequence of what's called "pluralism." You have in this country 16,000 local school committees, and they ultimately make educational decisions. Given that amount of pluralism, you're never going to have a nice, neat rational thing from the Minister of Education which goes right down to every teacher in the country. Nor would we want it. So, one consequence of our

system, I think, is an inevitable confusion, an ambiguity, and something that appears to European visitors, like Toqueville, like absolute chaos. The funny thing is that there are times when it proves to be very adaptable, and it works quite well, and the better the information the more adaptable it is. If I could give a brief example? If you look at a Russian hockey team, the Soviets always use pre-packaged plays, and everybody knows exactly where they're supposed to be at every minute on the ice. If you look at an American hockey team, they often have this marvelously rag-tag way of putting together a highly creative play at the last minute that nobody ever thought of, and the members of the team don't always know how they did it. So, the virtues of that kind of flexible system are, I think, considerable. Unfortunately, the Russians tend to beat us at hockey . . . (Laughter) . . . but it's still a nice way to look at it.

MERROW: You might point out that the Czechoslovakians won the world championship.

HODGKINSON: Right. There you go! So, we have a pluralistic system, and research plays a part in that, but it's because of the nature of pluralism that we have so much trouble getting nice, single-minded conclusions to our research, but I wouldn't have the system, I think, any other way. I'm glad we have 16,000 locally elected school committees running the educational policy of the country.

MERROW: Noel?

EPSTEIN: Well, I'd agree with Bud about local control of the schools, obviously. As for the future of research, I have no doubt that we will continue to fund research, and the problem is, essentially, to find better ways to make better use of research - and to make the public understand.

MERROW: We're asking you for better ways. I want some quick and easy solutions.

EPSTEIN: Well, my better ways -- as far as I'm an expert on this, and I wonder if I am, but my better way is, again, to find out what helps which children the most, and let those 16,000 local school districts apply that expertise to the children in their school districts. That would require this great tolerance for ambiguity by the politicians -- and ambiguity not only doesn't make good headlines, but it doesn't make good politics. But I think that there's no choice but to continue to keep trying to find out, and I think the Federal role is critical in this area because I think the Federal government is the only one with the capacity to do the research on the scale necessary to answer these questions on how best to help different children under different circumstances - rather than one technique or another technique "works" or "doesn't work."

BLAIR: Noel Epstein, Education Editor of The Washington Post, and Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of The National Institute of Education. So, there you have it! Education Research -- Is It Worth It?

MERROW: Well, clearly, some of it's very valuable - like the longitudinal studies that record the progress of groups of students over ten or twenty year periods.

BLAIR: Hodgkinson referred to the study of "Compensatory Education." That's given Congress and the rest of us the first accurate look at what the

gigantic Title I program, aimed at upgrading education in low-income areas, is actually accomplishing.

MERROW: The highest ranking Federal education official, Dr. Mary Berry, the Assistant Secretary for Education, wants more basic, pure research. She likens it to cancer research - saying that you have to look for basic causes. For his part, Hodgkinson seems to prefer more synthesis, more studies which consider all past research on the subject and synthesizing it into usable form.

BLAIR: Nobody has much use for some of the apparently trivial studies that occupy a lot of time, space and energy - not to mention pages in the AERA Convention Catalog.

WOMAN: The title of my paper, which probably will bore the radio audience, and it's probably the longest title in the entire program, has to do with "An Exploration of the Implications of the Maut-Bayesian Decision-Making Model for Summative and Formative Evaluation and Post-Assessment Organizational Change."

MERROW: I do think you've won the trophy?

WOMAN: Okay, right. I mean, it took three full lines in the program.

MERROW: Material for this program came in part from Eric Baum, KHKE-KUNI, Cedar Falls, Iowa, and David Selvin in Washington.

WOMAN: The one study which investigated field dependence in test anxiety found no relationship between them. However, just thinking about cognitive styles as adapted controls, and, you know, they regulate behavior, and the idea that drives form higher order systems and cognitive styles form lower order systems . . . .

BLAIR: If you'd like a transcript of this program, and last [illegible]'s special examination of standardized testing, send $1.00 to National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036. The two cassettes cost $10.00. Please ask for Programs #78 & 79, and please tell us the call letters of your NPR station.

WOMAN: It's my opinion that that test is not testing any style. It's testing a certain cognitive ability, and that that's why you get these high correlations with the other inter-cognitive performance tests, because it's really a cognitive abilities test rather than a cognitive styles test.

BLAIR: We also have a catalog free for the asking. It has a list of upcoming programs and another list of available back transcripts. Write us.

WOMAN: This is where the first indication that field dependence may be a different variable for females than males. Barrett in '55 found that . . .

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